

Message Text

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TEL AVIV FOR AMBASSADOR

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINT, UR
SUBJECT: ROY MEDVEDEV ON BREZHNEV

1. SUMMARY. ROY MEDVEDEV COMMENTED DEC 17 THAT BREZHNEV IS UNIQUE EXAMPLE IN SOVIET HISTORY OF MAN TOTALLY WITHOUT CHARACTERISTICS WHO REACHED THE TOP AND THEN DEVELOPED A DISTINCT POLITICAL PERSONALITY. PROCESS WAS DRAWN OUT AND ONLY RECENTLY COMPLETED: BREZHNEV HAD NOT BEEN MOTOR IN KHRUSHCHEV OUSTER, HAD HAD INVASION OF CZECHOSLOVAKIA FORCED ON HIM BY SHELEST' AND OTHERS LIKE HIM, AND HAD BEEN FORCED TO APPEAL TO GRECHKO IN SPRING 1970. NOW, HOWEVER, HE IS LEADERSHIP'S ONLY LIBERAL. HE WISHES TO MANAGE SYSTEM WITHOUT SHOCKS, SO LIBERALISM HAS NO IDEOLOGICAL BASIS, BUT IT IS GENUINE IN PRACTICE, AND IF "CZECHOSLOVAKIA SITUATION" AROSE IN EASTERN EUROPE TODAY THERE WOULD BE NO INVASION. WE OFFER COMMENTS AS SOVIETS COUNTERPOINT TO BIRTHDAY WAVE OF OFFICIAL ADULATION. END SUMMARY.

2. ROY MEDVEDEV'S COMMENTS ON BREZHNEV, IN COURSE OF FUNCTION HOSTED BY AMERICAN EXCHANGE VISITOR AND
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ATTENDED BY ACTING POL COUNS AND AAFATT DEC 16, MAY PROVIDE INTERESTING SOVIET COUNTERPOINT TO CURRENT SURGE OF OFFICIAL ADULATION FOR LEONID IL'ICH'S 70TH BIRTHDAY DEC 19. MEDVEDEV SAID HE IS FINISHING AN ARTICLE ON BREZHNEV'S CAREER.

3. THE MYSTERY AND THE PROBLEM, SAID MEDVEDEV, IS HOW A MAN TOTALLY WITHOUT PERSONALITY COULD REACH THE TOP IN THE SOVIET POLITICAL SYSTEM, AND THEN DEVELOP A POLITICAL PERSONALITY OF HIS OWN. THE CASE OF BREZHNEV HAD NO PARALLEL IN SOVIET HISTORY. STALIN CERTAINLY, AND KHRUSHCHEV TOO, HAD HAD DISTINCT PROFILES BEFORE THEY REACHED THE TOP. KHRUSHCHEV IN MOSCOW MAY HAVE LOOKED LIKE A CREATURE OF KAGANOVICH, BUT IN THE UKRAINE HE HAD BEEN HIS OWN MAN, EVEN THOUGH UNDER STALIN'S WITH TRAITS, FEATURES, DISTINCT FROM OTHERS AND REPRESENTING SOMETHING. THIS HAD NOT BEEN THE CASE WITH BREZHNEV. HE HAD BEEN THE INVISIBLE MAN, WITHOUT CHARACTESISTICS, REPRESENTING NOTHING. IT WAS A TEMPTATION TO SAY HE HAD ADVANCED PRECISELY BECAUSE OF THIS NIULLITY, AND HAD BEEN CHOSEN FOR SUCCESSIVELY HIGHER POSTS BECAUSE HE THEREFORE THREATENED NO ONE. HE WAS NOT EVEN ANYBODY'S MAN--MEDVEDEV DENIED BREZHNEV HAD BEEN KHRUSHCHEV'S MAN BEFORE HE HAD TURNED ON HIS BENEFACTOR--AND THIS WAS UNUSUAL IN THE FEUDALIZED SOVIET SYSTEM.

4. SINCE BREZHNEV HAS BEEN IN POWER, MEDVEDEV WENT ON, HE HAS DEVELOPED A PERSONALITY, AND NOW REPRESENTS SOMETHING. THIS DEVELOPMENT PROCEEDED SLOWLY, AND HAS ONLY BEEN COMPLETED FARILY RECENTLY. IT HAD BEEN SHELEPIN AND SUSLOV BETWEEN THEM WHO HAD ENGINEERED THE OUSTER OF KHRUSHCHEV IN 1964; BREZHNEV HIMSELF HAD NOT HAD A MOTOR ROLE. IN 1968, HE HAD NOT WANTED THE INVASION OF CZECHOSLOVAKIA, WHICH HAD BEEN FOISTED ON HIM AND OTHERS WHO WERE ALSO AGAINST IT BY THOSE WHO
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REMAINED IN MOSCOW, HEADED BY SHELEST', WHILE THE REST WENT ON VACATION AFTER CERNA. SIMILARLY, HIS POSITION AND PERSONALITY HAD NOT BEEN SECURE WHEN HE HAD GONE TO MINSK IN THE SPRING OF 1970 TO OBTAIN GRECHKO'S SUPPORT AGAINST SHELEPIN AND THE OTHERS TRYING TO OUST HIM. (GRECHKO, LIKE ALL THE REST OF THE SOVIET MILITARY LEADERS, WAS MOVED BY PURELY PERSONAL CONSIDERATIONS WHEN HE INTERVENED IN POLITICS; THERE WAS NO "IDEOLOGICAL" BASIS FOR THE SUPPORT HE GAVE, NO MORE THAN THERE HAD BEEN FOR THE MILITARY LEADERS WHO HAD SUPPORTED KHRUSHCHEV: THEY HAD MERELY HATED BERIA.)

5. NOW, MEDVEDEV CONCLUDED, BREZHNEV DID IN FACT HAVE A PERSONALITY, AND A POLICY. IF A SITUATION SIMILAR TO CZECHOSLOVAKIA AROSE IN EASTERN EUROPE NOW, THERE WOULD BE NO INVASION, BECAUSE HE WOULD BE AGAINST IT. ASKED WHO WAS "LIBERAL" AMONG SOVIET LEADERS,

MEDVEDEV SAID "BREZHNEV, AND HE IS THE ONLY ONE." HE IS LIBERAL BECAUSE HE WANTS QUIET, NO BOTHER, NO SHOCKS, NO SHARP TURNS, MERELY SEDATE MANAGEMENT OF THE SYSTEM AND ENJOYMENT OF HIS OWN POWER POSITION. HIS "LIBERALISM" WAS THEREFORE NO MORE IDEOLOGICAL THAN THE POSITIONS OF ANY OF THE OTHER LEADERS, BUT IT WAS LIBERAL IN ITS EFFECTS.

6. WITHOUT BEING OPTIMISTIC, MEDVEDEV NOTED, IT WAS STILL POSSIBLE TO SEE IN BREZHNEV THE EXAMPLE OF A MAN WHO CHANGED, AND GREW, LATE IN LIFE, ONCE HE HAD REACHED THE TOP.

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